

ALCOHOL IS A DRUG TOO



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Some Facts About Alcohol

Whether you drink occasionally or regularly, you need to consider that alcohol is a drug too. There are several reasons for older people to think again about the effects of alcoholic beverages:

- ❖ Alcohol has stronger effects on our bodies as we age.
- ❖ Alcohol interacts with many prescription and over-the-counter medicines.
- ❖ Alcohol can worsen some medical conditions that are common among older adults.
- ❖ The physical and emotional stresses that accompany aging can pose a new risk for alcohol dependence.

How Much Is Too Much?

For most older people, a drink a day is safe if consumed slowly and with food. More than two drinks a day is probably too much. A drink is any of the following: 12 ounces of beer, 4 ounces of wine, 3 ounces of sherry, or 1 ounce of hard liquor (they all contain the same amount of alcohol).

Beneficial Effects

The main beneficial effects of alcohol are the pleasant taste of alcoholic beverages and the mild relaxation that accompanies moderate use. Light drinking may protect against coronary heart disease, but a safer and more effective means of preventing heart disease is to exercise regularly, stick to a low-fat diet, and avoid tobacco use.

Harmful Effects

Alcohol increases the risk of injuries, especially falls. Drinking 3 or more drinks a day can lead to high blood pressure, heart disease, liver damage, cancers of the digestive tract, depression, and other medical problems. Alcohol can lessen the helpful effects of some medications and worsen the side effects of some others (see opposite side).

Alcohol And Common Medical Problems

Alcohol can affect several medical problems that are common among older people:

Diabetes. Alcohol can make control of blood sugar more difficult and can be very dangerous if taken on an empty stomach. However, a small amount of alcohol can be taken with a meal, provided your doctor says it is all right and its caloric value is considered.

Hypertension. Recent research has shown that those who drink every day tend to have slightly higher blood pressures than those who drink less frequently. Heavy drinking is a frequent cause of hypertension.

Insomnia. Difficulty in sleeping is a common problem with advancing years. Although alcohol causes drowsiness, it can disturb normal sleep patterns, causing increased wakefulness later in the night. Avoid alcohol after dinner.

Depression. Heavy drinking has been shown to cause depression.

Interactions between alcohol and commonly used medicines

Alcohol combined with Anti-depressants (e.g., amitriptyline, Elavil) Antihistamines (eg., diphenhydramine, Benadryl, chlorpheniramine, Chlor-Trimeton) Motion-sickness pills (e.g., Dramamine) Pain relievers (e.g., codeine, propoxyphene, Darvon) Sleeping medications (e.g., Halcion, flurazepam, Dalmane) Some cough/cold products Tranquilizers (e.g., lorazepam, Ativan, diazepam, Valium, alprazolam, Xanax) Ulcer medications (e.g., cimetidine, Tagamet, ranitidine, Zantac)	Can cause Excessive drowsiness, impaired coordination, falls, confusion, intoxication, loss of consciousness, impaired breathing.
Anti-anginal medication (e.g., nitroglycerin, Isordil) Some high-blood-pressure medications (e.g., prazosin, Minipress, diuretics)	Dizziness, lightheadedness, fainting, loss of consciousness, falls that could result in physical injury.
Aspirin Anti-arthritis medications (e.g., ibuprofen, Advil, Motrin, naproxen, Naprosyn, Dolobid)	Increase in stomach irritation, possible increase in stomach bleeding.
Alcohol can interact with many medications; check with your pharmacist for further information.	